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AUTHOR Bardon, Jack I.
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ABSTRACT

The literature on psychological consultation process and training has tended to ignore the influence of the attributes and expectations of consultees on consultation outcomes. Factors affecting the consultation process in one-to-one consultation services in the schools are discussed, and suggestions are presented for the preparation of teachers to receive consultation. Recommendations for improvement of research on school-based client and consultee-centered consultation are offered. (Author)

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The Consultee in Consultation: Preparation and Training¹

Jack I. Bardon

School of Education

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

In the past, too often, the literature on psychological consultation process and training and the outcomes of consultation service-delivery have reflected a one-sided view of what consultation is all about (Mannino, MacLenna, & Shore, 1975). Especially vulnerable to this accusation have been those kinds of consultation most commonly called client-centered and consultee-centered case consultation. Typically, we prepare a psychological specialist to offer consultation services to other people who may or may not know what the services are supposed to accomplish or how to work with a consultant. School psychology is a prime example of a psychological specialty offering consultation services to clients who often have an erroneous conception of what the psychologist is supposed to do, no conception at all, or distorted expectations about what the outcomes of consultation services might be.

In psychotherapeutic practice and research, it is expected that the effects of psychotherapy will be considered in relation to the attributes of the persons presenting their problems and their degree of motivation for participation. In consultation, especially school-based consultation, we appear to have been so concerned with those who will be helped by our consultees - our consultee's

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pupils - that we may have ignored the very factors which can lead to successful consultation practice and also to a clearer understanding of consultation outcomes. I am referring here to our need to know more about the attributes and expectations of our consultees (teachers) as well as their clients (pupils); the development in consultation training of sensitivity to the need for a firm understanding of what both parties in a consultation relationship are doing and expect to have happen; and, perhaps most important, a systematic attempt to prepare consultees for what the process involves and how they can best make use of it.

Many psychologists appear to show renewed interest these days in how our thoughts, values, and personal styles influence our actions (McKeachie, 1976). In areas as disparate as test construction and theory (Hunter & Schmidt, 1976), psychotherapy (Strupp & Hadley, 1977), and organizational psychology (Argyris, 1976) a common theme occurs which strongly suggests the importance of recognizing how people approach problems while engaging in professional activities. In school-based consultation, we have tended to treat teachers as though they all come from the same gene pool and to deal with individual differences when they occur as "resistance" or as "entry" problems, both of which tend to minimize the critical importance of the differences among teachers and their preparation for participation in the consultation process. (Friedman, 1976; Gallessich, 1974)

At least three consultee-related factors affect the consultation process in one-to-one consultation services in the schools: the immediate expectations of the consultee; professional orientation and knowledge about other professions which influence the meaning of receiving help from others; and the skills developed by the consultee to most effectively use the services of the consultant.

Ideally, preparation of teachers for involvement in school-based consultation should take place first in teacher preparation institutions. Teachers are not typically educated to use help. If anything, they are taught, implicitly or explicitly, that seeking assistance is a sign of professional weakness. Unlike physicians, lawyers, and even professional psychologists, among others, who are expected to seek consultation when making critical decisions in ambiguous situations, teachers are taught to solve their own problems in their own classrooms, and are evaluated negatively if they do not. Teachers have come to expect supervision as part of teaching, but supervision in education implies that teachers are not fully professional. Teachers do not usually ask for supervision or see it as part of their continuing education.

A point of view is needed in teacher education which imbues teachers in training with the idea that being a professional requires seeking consultation from others. Teachers need to know that teaching and the individual problems of pupils are often too complex for any one teacher to have all the answers; that all the answers are not in books or in the opinions of "higher-level" professionals, such as psychologists. Instead, they should be led to understand that learning takes place in the process of finding out the best solutions and alternatives in the here-and-now, given the limits of what is possible in the situation, and that using another professional is probably the best way of sorting out the good from the poor alternatives to action. Teachers need badly to view consultation as a professional activity which is their right rather than as a judgment on their competency or lack of it.

Course work in receiving consultation is highly desirable in teacher education. Such courses might include information about the nature of helping relationships, what special services personnel and mental health professionals

can and cannot do, how they are trained, and what in reality can be expected of them under different circumstances. Training would be given in question-asking and in how consultation process proceeds, with analysis of how consultants consult and how consultees react. We have a long history in professional psychology of receiving the wrong questions and acting on them. We need teachers who can say, "This is what I really want to know about. You are not addressing my questions. Let's see where we are so I can make best use of your services."

In this new curriculum offering, it will be important to help teachers know what they believe about teaching and learning, to help them to become knowledgeable consultees who can use consultation within a perspective of what is possible, as well as what is ideal. Much of what is now considered to be consultation involves attempting to get at a problem presented by a teacher and failing to do so because neither consultant nor consultee knows what issues are being addressed and what teacher-related factors are impinging on the consultation process and its possible outcomes. Given that teachers can learn how to receive consultation, the role of the consultant becomes that of a trained professional who is used by those who want help in problem solving.

In the absence of adequate teacher training in consultation, school-based consultation best begins with a clear and perhaps even prolonged discussion with a teacher of what the consultant can and cannot do, and with the questions the teacher wants to ask. In-service education aimed at helping teachers think about how they teach and what they believe teaching and learning are about is recommended as the best on-site method of preparing teachers to receive consultation. It is also suggested that consultation be offered only to these teachers who agree to use it with a full understanding of what are the responsibilities of both consultant and consultee.

Much of what is now considered to be consultation in the schools is really influence technique of a variety of kinds used with teachers who have not always agreed to be influenced. (Meyers, Martin, & Hyman, 1977) A distinction needs to be made in consultation practice and research between those teachers who truly seek professional consultation and those who want service for children but do not see themselves as part of the process.

Research on consultation process and the effectiveness of training will present ambiguous results, at least until attention is directed to the intentions of the consultee, the preparation of the consultee for receiving consultation, and the distinction between consultation to teachers who request it and referrals of pupils for direct service by teachers who do not request it.

Finally, it is suggested that research on school-based client and consultee-centered consultation concern itself with teacher satisfaction and changes rather than with the effects of consultation on the consultee's clients, the pupils. As viewed here, school-based consultation is a service to other adults who work with children. The changes which occur in these adults as a function of participation in consultation is complex and needs our immediate attention. We have tended to perceive the teacher as a means to get at the pupil. In doing so, we have negated the importance of our role in the professional development and activities of teachers. To measure successful outcomes of consultation with teachers by evaluating pupil progress is like measuring successful outcomes of supervision of trainees in professional psychology by how many of their clients or patients are cured. We know better in our own work but need to learn who our client is in teacher-based consultation.

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